

“ Rural Housing.”

By MISS C. COCHRANE (Member).

(ABSTRACT.)

IT is a grateful sight to travellers throughout the country to see everywhere the large numbers of cottages which have been built during the last two years. But more are still wanted in many districts, and it is earnestly to be hoped that effort will not be relaxed until the demand has been met, and also cottages unfit to live in have been replaced by others. The urgent need for economy at the present time, if the nation is not to become bankrupt, necessitates the need for the greatest care in the building of the cottages, provided that a sufficiency of space is never sacrificed. There is no doubt that in many instances unduly large profits have been made by builders and contractors. Local authorities should refuse to build at such prices as £900 and £1,000 a cottage. In the rural district where I live, in Cambs., my Council have not paid more than £1,350 for any pair of cottages in their district, and where it is close to a station the price is £1,180. The Council refuses to pay more, and I may say the cottages are well built, with living room 18 ft. by 12 ft., scullery 18 ft. by 11 ft., a good-sized larder, and an out-house adjoining the main building 12 ft. by 7 ft. There are three bedrooms, the smallest of which holds a double bed. The cottages are of brick and slate, and each is provided with a quarter of an acre of garden ground.

In places where a water supply is impossible the Ministry will recognise the proper storage of rain water.

Councils might do more than is done at present by buying old cottages which, from disrepair, etc., are unfit for occupation, and by spending, say, £200, on restoring and adding what is necessary, they could let such cottages at a rent which would be economic or nearly so. Such cottages can often be bought for about £20 from little men who cannot afford to repair. This aspect of the Housing question has not received the attention it deserves.

A few months ago the Ministry of Health entirely changed its views in regard to the non-parlour house. Before this they raised the strongest objection to the scullery being anything larger than a place where it would be impossible for the family to live in. The Housing Commissioner, at the time my Council's plans were presented, took great exception to the size of the scullery, and it was only owing to our very determined attitude that he gave way. He had ruled out the parlour, and we therefore considered that the scullery must be of a size for the family to take their meals in if they desired, and this enables the living room to serve also the purpose of a parlour. A few months ago plans of this kind were brought out by the Ministry

itself, who said it had been forcibly brought to their notice that there was a considerable demand for this type of cottage. I have also been glad to see that in many of the more recent plans the size of the third bedroom has been increased. The size of this room in the original plans was ridiculously small, holding only a single bed, and therefore perfectly useless where there is a large family of boys and girls. No rural Council ought to consent to the provision of rooms of such a size. The barn or outhouse is another necessity in a rural district, and all Rural District Councils ought to insist on these where the imagination of the Housing Commissioner does not extend as far as the country. With a quarter of an acre of garden, wheelbarrow and tools are needed, also storage for poultry food, straw for pigs, wood, bicycles, etc., etc. I have seen wheat stored in the parlour and onions under the bed because there was no other place to keep them in.

Drains are not required where there is a quarter of an acre of garden, as the contents of the E.C. can be disposed of here to the enrichment and improvement of the soil. They can be dug into the ground in trenches about 4 inches deep. The slop water can either be taken to a small concreted tank in the garden and used for watering the plants, or it can be led from a pipe leading from the sink to the outside into a half-trench pipe laid loosely and conducted a little way down the garden, and currant and gooseberry bushes can be planted at the sides.

A steamless copper was a great boon.

Mr. ROBINSON (Durham C.C.) congratulated the Author on the fact that she had provided steam escape pipes in connection with the set-pots, or coppers, and by so doing had set an example to many responsible for housing schemes where such necessary adjuncts were often absent. He also showed that the deplorable conditions revealed in a recent inspection by him of over 20 urban districts, and the present terrible cost of repairs, had impressed him with the hopelessness of proceeding to seek a remedy on the present uneconomic lines, and that he had come to the conclusion that generally speaking, little or no real progress either with new houses or carrying out necessary repairs to old ones can be made till we get down to something like pre-war costs, and that, in his opinion, to bring this about the Government should apply itself diligently to the cheapening of the necessities of life, and the materials necessary for the proper housing of the community.

Miss CHURTON (London) said that last year, through the instrumentality of the Rural Housing Association, an old cottage in Norfolk was renovated and remodelled at a cost of slightly under £400. The cottage had stood empty for fifty years owing to its dilapidated condition. Now it was a good four bed-roomed cottage, considered the best in the village.

If work of this kind were more generally taken up, both by Local Authorities and private enterprise, it would do much towards improving the housing conditions in our villages.

Dr. BERTRAM HILL (Selby). The demand for houses in Rural Districts is rather to replace bad property than to house increasing population. The farm labourer is quite unable to pay the high rent of new houses, therefore the only possible way is for local authorities to purchase old houses and alter them—converting two cottages into one good one, or renovating old ones, than building houses which people are unable to go into.

This matter has never been considered seriously by the Housing Authorities (Central) at all.

Mr. E. WILLIS (Chiswick) said that he had already had some small experience in conversion of houses into flats, and agreed that in many cases this was both practical and beneficial, but there were some houses with basements which were most unsuited for such treatment, although even these were being altered in and near London, and adopted for tenement dwellings. The main point in rural districts was as to the structure. If that were good, then he agreed with the author of the paper, that alterations could be usefully carried out, but not otherwise.

It might be possible to acquire large houses in rural districts, which fail to let, and convert them into two or three smaller houses

Alderman JOSEPH HOWELLS, J.P. (Glamorgan C.C.). Architects do not like old houses patched up, they prefer to have new ones built, but I see no reason why old houses should not be made habitable in rural districts. Is there a more economical way of building houses than by bricks and mortar?

Re Local Authorities lending money to renovate houses.—He had not heard of any local authorities doing so, but if after giving notice to the landlord to put a house in order, he failed to comply, the local authorities could step in, do the necessary work, and charge the landlord with the expense.

Mr. SMITH (Northumberland). The experience in Northumberland was that renovations could not be carried out to old houses until the present tenants had been removed. When tenants had moved into new houses the old ones could be repaired, but as the Ministry had cut down the number of houses to be erected in many districts, there were, in some instances, three applicants to every house erected, and, therefore, it did not appear that the renovation of old houses could be carried out.

A difficulty which would undoubtedly arise in the future would be the outcome of the Ministry's new policy of cutting down the previously agreed "housing needs" of the various districts.

It must not be forgotten that many local authorities have very unwillingly entered into their obligations in providing housing accommodation, and although the housing shortage in their respective districts had often been acute, they refused or neglected to use the enabling powers of the 1890 Act until they were compelled to do so by virtue of Section 1 of the 1919 Act.

Such authorities would receive the Ministry's "cutting down" programme with open arms and the position as regards the old houses would then be most deplorable.

Sanitary inspectors had been waiting for years for the acute housing shortage to be met by the provision of new houses so as to provide accommodation sufficient not only to relieve overcrowding, but to provide alternative accommodation for the thousands of families living in houses unfit for habitation, or which were so defective that the necessary ameliorative measures could not be carried out without the removal of the occupying tenants. The Ministry's previous efforts in "forcing up" the housing needs in the respective districts engendered a lively hope that these housing programmes would be shortly carried out and we should be able to get on with our part of the job, but the "cutting down" policy which was now officially adopted at headquarters, would mean that sanitary inspectors would have to wait several more years before they could begin their part of the national housing programme, that was (to quote Sec. 7 of the 1885 Housing Act), "to put into force the powers with which local authorities are invested so as to secure the proper sanitary conditions of all 'premises within the area under our control.'"

Miss COCHRANE (St. Neots). In reply to Mr. Alderman Joseph Howell's enquiry as to whether houses could be more economically built than by bricks and mortar, said in Cambridgeshire she was building a house with clay lump; in Norfolk many of that kind were built at from £95 to £100 cheaper than in brick. The rent question seemed to be an ever increasing problem, and had not been made easier by the Rent Restrictions Act.
